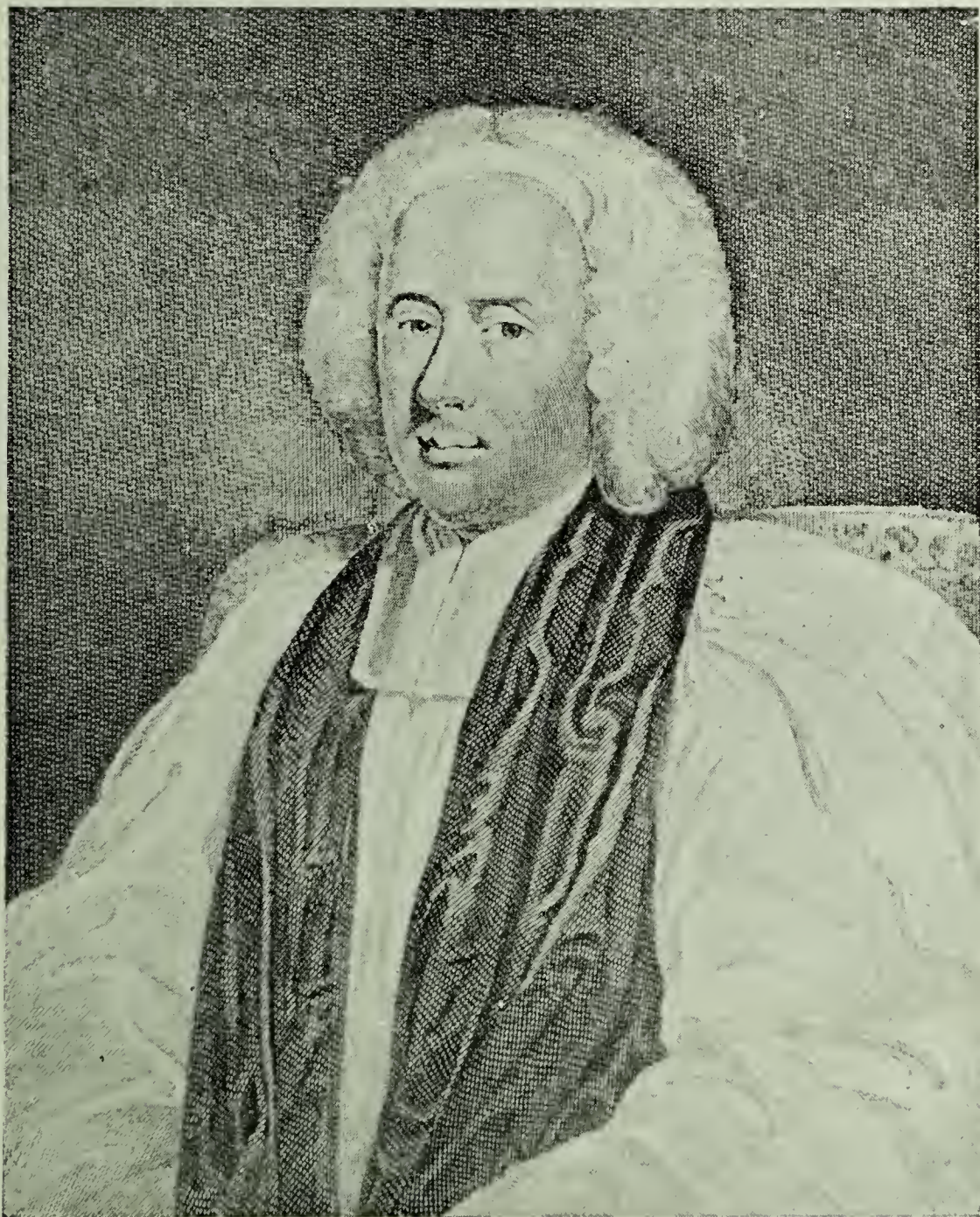


# BISHOP BUTLER.

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# BISHOP BUTLER.



## I.

### EARLY LIFE.



JOSEPH BUTLER was born at Wantage, in Berkshire, the birthplace of King Alfred, on May 18, 1692. He was the youngest of eight children. Their father had been a linendraper in that place; but, previously to Joseph's birth, had retired from business and resided at the extremity of the town, in a house called the Priory, where the room is pointed out in which the great writer first saw the light. The honour of laying the foundation of his education is due to the Rev. P. Barton, a clergyman of the Church

of England, and master of the Wantage Grammar School. But the father, a Presbyterian, perceiving in his son signs of genius as well as a serious disposition, resolved to educate him for the ministry of his own communion, and with this view removed him to an academy at Gloucester (afterwards removed to Tewkesbury), kept by Mr. Samuel Jones, an able scholar. It is no slight testimony to Jones's ability as a tutor that such men as Archbishop Secker, Bishops Maddox and Butler, Dr. Lardner, Dr. Chandler, and Lord Bowes, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, were trained by him. Here young Butler made extraordinary progress in theology, and at the early age of twenty-one gave the first promise of his great capacity for abstract reasoning and metaphysical research in his correspondence with



Dr. Samuel Clarke, who had just published his celebrated *Discourse concerning the Being and Attributes of God*. It appears from Butler's own account that this subject had long occupied his thoughts, and that, therefore, it was with peculiar interest that he set himself to examine a treatise which promised to supply what he had been seeking for in vain—a demonstrative proof of the existence and the character of the Deity. Clarke's reasoning, however, did not satisfy the youth's subtle and searching intellect. He discovered, as he then thought, two serious flaws in the argument (the omnipresence and unity of God, according to Clarke, being demonstrable from the necessity of His being), and resolved to apply to the author for the solution of his difficulties. He felt himself too young, and was too modest to give his name. So it was arranged that Secker, his fellow-student, should carry his letters to the Gloucester Post-office and bring back Clarke's answers from that city. So much struck was that learned metaphysician with the depth of the anonymous writer's intellect and the force of his reasoning on these abstruse subjects, that the correspondence went on for some time, terminating with Clarke's fifth reply and many expressions of respect and admiration on both sides. Clarke's esteem for Butler, when he came to know him, was proved by his publishing the letters in the subsequent editions of his treatise, and by his using his influence in the young man's favour on every fitting occasion. Eventually Butler's doubts gave way on the points objected to, and when his *Analogy* was published they appear to have been quite dissipated. One sentence in these letters affords us a suggestive glimpse into the mind of the future champion of the faith. 'I design,' he writes, 'the search after truth as the business of my life.'

About this time doubts arose in his mind as to the propriety of continuing his connection with the Nonconformist body in which he had been brought up. These, ere long, became so serious as to awaken his father's anxiety. Conferences with some Presbyterian ministers were proposed and held, but without any satisfactory result to his family or their advisers. So his father, seeing his son's mind made up to join the Church of England, consented to enter him as a commoner at Oriel College, Oxford, on March 17, 1714.

II.

ORDINATION.

AT Oxford he became intimate with Mr. Edward Talbot, son of the then Bishop of Salisbury, whose friendship and influence led to Butler's rapid advancement. Mr. Talbot was about that time a member of a 'Society for the restoration of Primitive Christianity,' founded by the eccentric William Whiston. This society was soon broken up, and Talbot was appointed to the living of Hendred, near Wantage. This was in 1717, and we gather from the fact that Butler occasionally supplied Talbot's place in his parish, that he was ordained about that time, no doubt at Salisbury, although no documentary record of the fact appears to have survived. Certain it is that early in the next year, when only twenty-six years of age, he was made preacher at the Rolls Chapel, upon the joint recommendation of Mr. Talbot and Dr. Clarke, then Rector of St. James's, Westminster. Butler appeared in London at a stormy period, when the whole world of politics and theology was engaged in a controversy connected with Bishop Hoadly's sermons on the Nature of Christ's Kingdom. The country was, in consequence, agitated by a fierce conflict between Whigs and Tories in politics, and High and Low Church in religion. Butler appears to have sympathised warmly with Hoadly and his party, and is said to have been the writer of a *Letter of Thanks from a Young Clergyman to the Rev. Dr. Hare for his Visitation Sermon at Putney*—an indirect attack on Hare for his time-serving conduct in deserting Hoadly and joining the High Church side. The style and tone of this pamphlet are not, however, thought to be such as to favour Butler's authorship.

Edward Talbot died in 1720, at the early age of twenty-nine; on his death-bed commending his two friends, Butler and Secker, to his father's good offices. In 1721, Dr. Talbot was translated to the see of Durham, and one of his first acts was to appoint Butler, who was then Prebendary of Salisbury, to the living of Haughton-le-Skerne, near Darlington. The living was, however, but a poor one; and he speedily became embarrassed by the necessity of rebuilding the parsonage.



The bishop (it is said at the instance of Secker) came to the rescue, and transferred Butler, in 1725, to the rich rectory of Stanhope-in-Weardale. Here he remained for fifteen years (1725–1740), and found in the seclusion of a rural parish, combined with freedom from worldly anxieties, full opportunity for the crowning work of his life. It was at Stanhope that Butler meditated and wrote his *Analogy*.

### III.

#### HIS 'SERMONS' AND 'ANALOGY.'

**I**N 1726, Butler resigned his position at the Rolls Chapel. Before doing so he published his celebrated *Fifteen Sermons* preached there. The selection of these from a number of others delivered from the same pulpit was, as he tells us in the preface, 'determined by circumstances in great measure accidental.' It would seem, therefore, that the rest were, in the bishop's opinion, in most respects equal in value to those that have been preserved. What became of them? Dr. Fitzgerald conjectures that they may have been afterwards embodied in the *Analogy*. If this were so, our loss would not be so great as it would otherwise appear. In any case, those that have come down to us still hold a distinguished place amongst the text-books of moral science. The *Three Sermons on Human Nature*, in particular, with their masterly analysis of the mental constitution of man, and their vindication of the supremacy of conscience in the hierarchy of human faculties and affections, have had a lasting influence on philosophic thought. Dr. Chalmers pronounced them 'the most precious repertory of sound ethical principles extant in any language.'

As Rector of Stanhope, Butler, although not inattentive to his pastoral duties, lived very much the life of a recluse. He was unmarried, as he continued to be to the end of his life; and his great work must have constantly occupied his thoughts. The late Dr. Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, who held the living from 1820 to 1830, made it his business to inquire of the 'oldest inhabitant' concerning his great predecessor. The letter in which he gives the result of his

inquiries is interesting, and connects Butler's time almost with our own:—

'I was assured,' says Dr. Phillpotts, 'that an old parishioner, who, with a tolerably clear memory, had reached the age of ninety-three or ninety-four, recollected him well. To him I frequently went, and in almost all my conversations endeavoured to elicit something respecting "Rector Butler." He remembered him well, but, as I ought, perhaps, to have anticipated, could tell me nothing; for what chance was there that one who was a joiner's apprentice, of thirteen years of age, when Butler left Stanhope, could, four-score years afterwards, tell anything about him? That he was respected and beloved by his parishioners, which was known before, was confirmed by my informant. He lived very retired, was very kind, and could not resist the importunities of common beggars, who, knowing his infirmity, pursued him so earnestly, as sometimes to drive him back into his house as his only escape. There was, moreover, a tradition of his riding a black pony, and riding always very fast. I examined the parish books, not with much hope of discovering anything worth recording of him, and was, unhappily, as unsuccessful as I had expected. His name, indeed, was subscribed to one or two acts of vestry, in a very neat and easy character; but, if it was amusing, it was mortifying to find the only trace of such a man's labours recorded by his own hand, to be the passing of a parish account authorising the payment of five shillings to some adventurous clown who had destroyed a "foumart," or wood-marten, the marten-cat, or some other equally important matter.'

It is only fair to say that a visitor to Stanhope, in 1875, the Rev. Dr. Alexander B. Grosart,<sup>1</sup> was able to discover in the parish register some more significant entries, showing that the illustrious rector paid a business-like regard to the humbler claims of his parishioners. It is tantalising to have no more, and only to be able to conjecture how far his parochial sermons might compare with the sermons to a very different audience at the Rolls.<sup>2</sup>

Butler, however, was not long left to labour in obscurity. In 1733, Secker, who was almost a neighbour, being Rector of Houghton-le-Spring, in the diocese of Durham, concerned lest the spirits of his friend should sink from overthought and the want of intellectual intercourse, persuaded

<sup>1</sup> See the *Leisure Hour*, April 17, 1875, for Dr. Grosart's charming description of the neighbourhood and scenery of Stanhope.

<sup>2</sup> One sermon, purporting to be his, preached at Stanhope, has been preserved, and is reproduced in Mr. Gladstone's edition. It is at least plain and sensible, as well as evangelical, and may well represent Butler's style of addressing a village congregation.



Lord Chancellor Talbot, son of the bishop, to appoint him as his own chaplain; when also Butler took his degree of D.C.L. at Oxford; and in 1736 he was made Prebendary of Rochester. In the latter year, Queen Caroline, whose strong judgment could not fail to appreciate such rare merit, heard of him from Secker, who had in the meantime been made chaplain to the King. The Queen said she had thought Butler was dead, and although Secker assured her Majesty to the contrary, she repeated the same question to Archbishop Blackburne, and received from him the apt and witty reply: 'No, ma'am, he is not dead, but he is buried.' The hint thus humorously conveyed led to Butler's appointment as Clerk of the Closet to the Queen.

Just before this he had completed and published, with a dedication to the Lord Chancellor, his *Analogy*, the full title of which is *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, a copy of which he presented to her Majesty. It speaks not a little for her intellectual ability that she so far appreciated its value that Lord Bolingbroke, the Deist, is said to have sarcastically remarked: 'Queen Caroline studies with much application the *Analogy*. She understands the whole argument perfectly, and concludes with the right reverend author that it is not so clear a case that there is nothing in revealed religion. Such royal, such lucrative encouragement must needs keep both metaphysics and the sublimest theology in credit.'

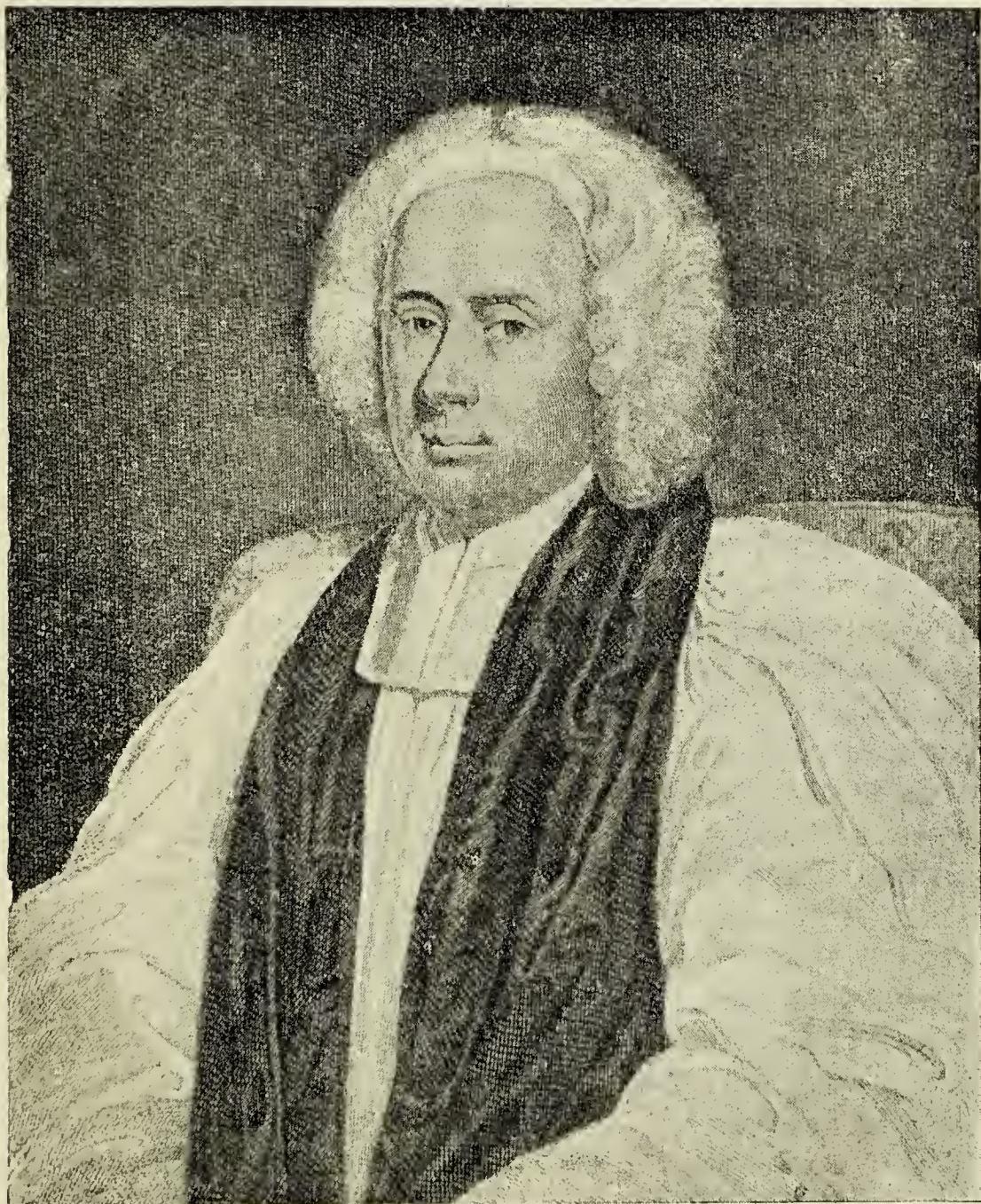
In truth, the company with which the Queen of George II. delighted to surround herself was almost unique in the history of Courts. In her rooms might be found, evening after evening, not only Butler and Secker, but Dr. Samuel Clarke, with Sherlock, Bishop of London, Bishop Hoadly, and the Christian philosopher, Bishop Berkeley. Their talk was of the highest themes; but Butler shrunk from this kind of debate. He declined to meet Lord Kaimes for discussion, on the ground of natural diffidence and reserve, as well as from the fear that the cause of truth might suffer from the unskilfulness of the advocate. David Hume, it is told, about this time wished to meet the author of the *Analogy*, and called upon him with his *Treatise on Human Nature*, carefully modified to meet the doctor's anticipated criticism.



## BISHOP BUTLER.

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Butler, however, was unfortunately not at home. What might have been the result, had two such champions met in open encounter!



ENGRAVED BY J. FITTLER, A.R.A., AFTER A DRAWING BY RAMSEY, TAKEN FROM AN ORIGINAL PICTURE IN THE INFIRMARY AT NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.

A curious story is told of the fate of one copy of the *Analogy*. On its publication Butler presented the volume to each of his nephews at Wantage. One of these, a wealthy and eccentric bachelor, who had more taste for practical



mechanics than for metaphysics, must have thought very lightly of his uncle's production. Having occasion to borrow an iron vice from a neighbour, Mr. Thompson, a shrewd, hard-headed Scotch solicitor, who spoke in high praise of the new work as well as of the writer, John Butler proposed that, as Mr. Thompson liked the book and he himself wanted a vice, they should make an exchange. To this the Scotchman readily consented, and the nephew considered that he had turned his uncle's gift to excellent account. Many, however, proved better capable of judging of Butler's real merits; and the *Analogy*, published at first in 4to., reached an 8vo. edition in less than a year.

#### IV.

#### MADE BISHOP OF BRISTOL.

**T**HE year after the publication of Butler's great work he lost in Queen Caroline a patroness and a friend. She died November, 1737. A few weeks before her death she had privately received the Holy Communion at his hands in Hampton Court. From her death-bed she pressed his claims on her husband, and the recommendation was remembered.

In the next year, 1738, the See of Norwich became vacant, and Dr. Gooch, the Bishop of Bristol, being translated to it, Butler was offered the latter bishopric. Bristol was then the poorest of English sees, not having an income of more than four hundred pounds, and the promotion of Gooch, whose claims fell far short of those of Butler, to Norwich, was considered a low manœuvre of Walpole, who may have thought that the ascetic Rector of Stanhope was too unworldly to be troubled about the poverty of the position or to perceive the slight which the offer implied. He, however, misread the man. In his letter of acceptance, with admirable tact, whilst in the most respectful terms he expressed his gratitude for the favour conferred upon him by the King, he did not scruple to let the minister understand how small regard he had shown for the Queen's dying wishes, by offering him a post which he was too poor to undertake without retaining his present appointments. 'Nor,' he added, 'is it possible, while I live, to be without the most grateful sense of his Majesty's favour to me, whether the effects of it be greater



or less, for this must in some measure depend upon accidents. Indeed, the bishopric of Bristol is not very suitable either to the condition of my fortune, or the circumstances of my preferment, nor, as I should have thought, answerable to the recommendation with which I was honoured. But you will excuse me, sir, if I think of the last with greater sensibility than the conduct of affairs will admit of.' This letter had the intended effect, for, two years later, when the rich deanery of St. Paul's fell vacant, the King at once nominated him to that dignity, and the bishop resigned Stanhope, which he had held *in commendam* along with his bishopric. In all these transactions he must not be judged by the higher and more spiritual standard which happily prevails now. He may seem to have been too much concerned about his own earthly advancement; and yet we cannot justly condemn him as a place-hunting or avaricious prelate, when we compare his conduct on other occasions, and when we find that he applied a great part of his income when at Bristol to the improving and beautifying of his palace and chapel, in which he was assisted by the merchants of the city, who presented him with a large quantity of cedar for the purpose. In this way he not only gratified his own taste for elegance in building, but permanently benefited his see.

One of the most notable occurrences during Butler's residence at Bristol was an interview with John Wesley, recorded in the *Journal* of the latter; but very probably the conversation, as reported, is unconsciously coloured by the mind of the reporter.

An incident of Butler's Bristol episcopate may here be mentioned, which gave considerable umbrage to many, and offered some slight occasion for the unfounded and most unjust charge of Popery propagated after his death. A white marble cross (not a crucifix), inlaid in a large black slab, was placed behind the communion table of his chapel, which remained there until the destruction of the building in the Bristol riots of 1831. From all we know of the bishop's views from both his writings and his actions, there is no reason to suppose that this was set up from superstitious motives, but simply as a symbol of the faith. Some of his best and wisest friends, such as Secker and Halifax, very

much regretted the offence given by this step. A successor in the See of Bristol was pressed by Lord Chancellor Hardwicke to remove the cross, but replied, 'What Bishop Butler has set up it is not for Bishop Young to pull down!'

A circumstance recorded of him about this time gives us a striking insight into his character. It relates to a conversation with Dr. Tucker, his chaplain, afterwards Dean of Gloucester. It appears to have been the bishop's custom at Bristol to walk for hours in his garden, even during the darkest nights. On one occasion, when the chaplain was with him, he suddenly asked him: 'What security is there against the insanity of individuals? The physicians know of none, and as to divines, we have no data either from Scripture or from reason to go upon relative to this affair.' 'True, my lord,' replied the chaplain, 'no man has a lease of his understanding any more than of his life; they are both in the hands of the Sovereign Disposer of all things.' The bishop then took another turn, and again inquired: 'Why might not whole communities and public bodies be seized with fits of insanity as well as individuals?' 'My lord,' said Dr. Tucker, 'I have never considered the case, and can offer no opinion concerning it.' 'Nothing,' added the bishop, 'but the principle that they are liable to insanity equally at least with private persons, can account for the major part of those transactions of which we read in history.' 'I thought little,' remarks Dr. Tucker, 'of that odd conceit of the bishop at that juncture, but I could not avoid thinking of it a great deal since, and applying it to many cases.' 'Butler,' observes Dr. Fitzgerald, 'was perhaps thinking of a remark of Bacon, that, when men are collected together in bodies, they come under the influence of a sort of sympathy, which propagates irrational impulses among them by a kind of contagion.'

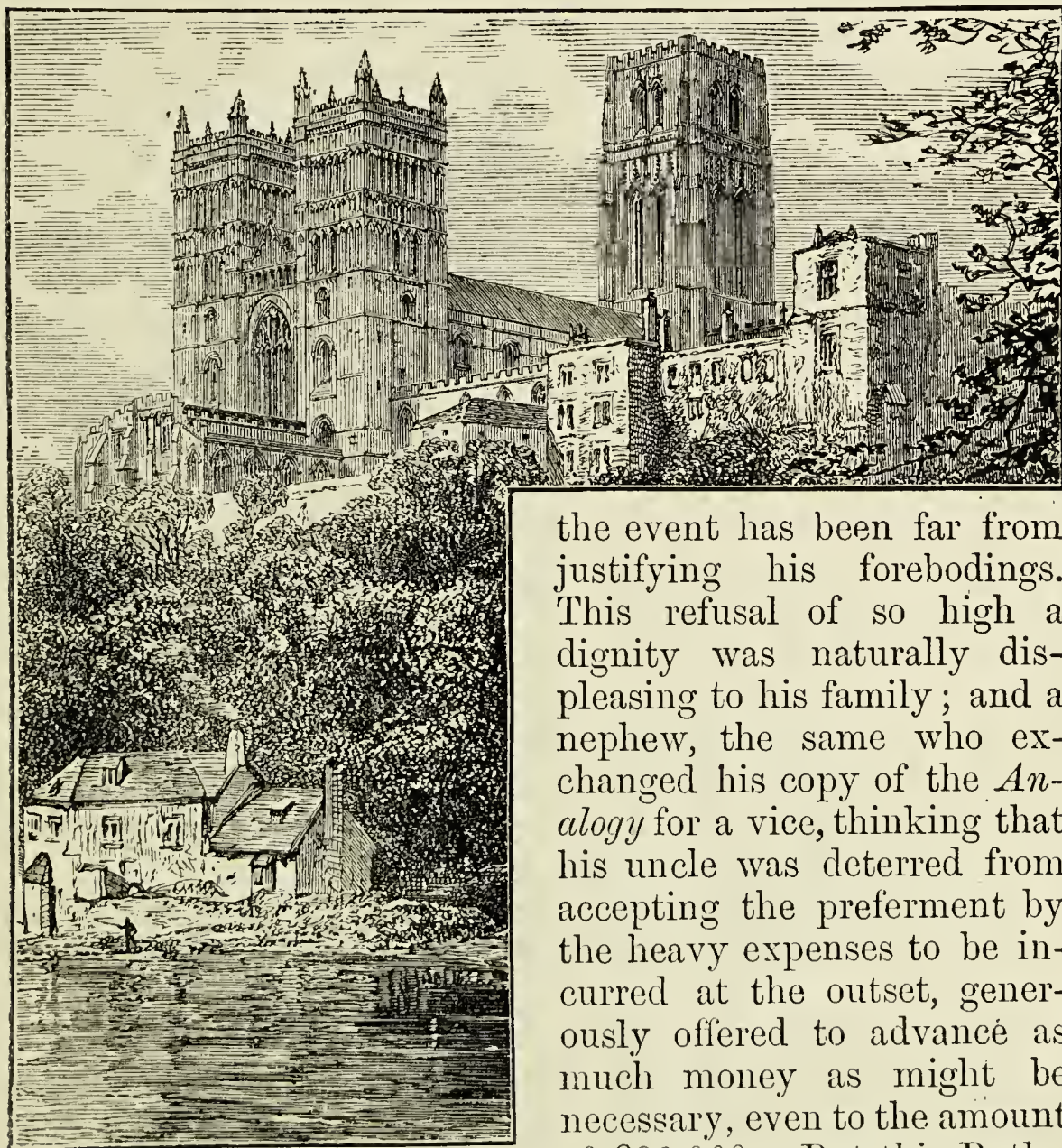
V.

MADE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

**T**HIS conversation, however, apart from its subject, too clearly indicates that constitutional melancholy to which the bishop was disposed. Another instance of this is on record. When on the death of Archbishop Potter,



in 1747, the Primacy was offered him, he declined it with these words: 'It is too late for me to try to support a falling Church.' He was no doubt depressed at the time by the gloomy aspect of society and the cold rigid formality which then reigned in the Church of England as well as outside her pale, though



DURHAM CATHEDRAL.

the event has been far from justifying his forebodings. This refusal of so high a dignity was naturally displeasing to his family; and a nephew, the same who exchanged his copy of the *Analogy* for a vice, thinking that his uncle was deterred from accepting the preferment by the heavy expenses to be incurred at the outset, generously offered to advance as much money as might be necessary, even to the amount of £20,000. But this Butler declined. Still his family's

ambitious hopes for him were soon afterwards gratified in another way, through his translation to the See of Durham in 1750. This promotion was not easily effected, for the bishop's scruples interposed a difficulty. He would not accept any conditions in such a matter. The Lieutenancy of the County



had hitherto been associated with the bishopric. The Court had determined to break through a custom which may have proved inconvenient, and Butler was offered the see without that other office, which was destined for a layman, Lord Barnard. This he would not consent to, thinking the terms derogatory to the honour of the diocese; but the King waived the point, and allowed him to undertake both appointments. Here again it is difficult for us to transfer ourselves back to the ecclesiastical standpoint in the Georgian period, and to enter into Butler's views of such questions. We can better understand another objection that had to be overcome before his final acceptance of Durham. By doing so he would vacate the Deanery of St. Paul's, which the Premier wished to give to Butler's old friend Secker, who held a stall at Durham; offering the latter to Dr. Chapman, Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge. This arrangement was unfortunately mentioned beforehand to the bishop; and, although he was most anxious to promote his friend's interest, he regarded the proposal as of the nature of a simoniacal bargain, to which his conscience would not let him consent. Nor would he yield in the matter, until it was placed on a less objectionable footing. In this, there is no doubt that he acted from the highest principles; while, it is interesting to observe, Secker and Chapman received their appointments after all.

Some letters of Butler on assuming the Durham episcopate have come down to us. We have only room to quote one to the Duchess of Somerset.

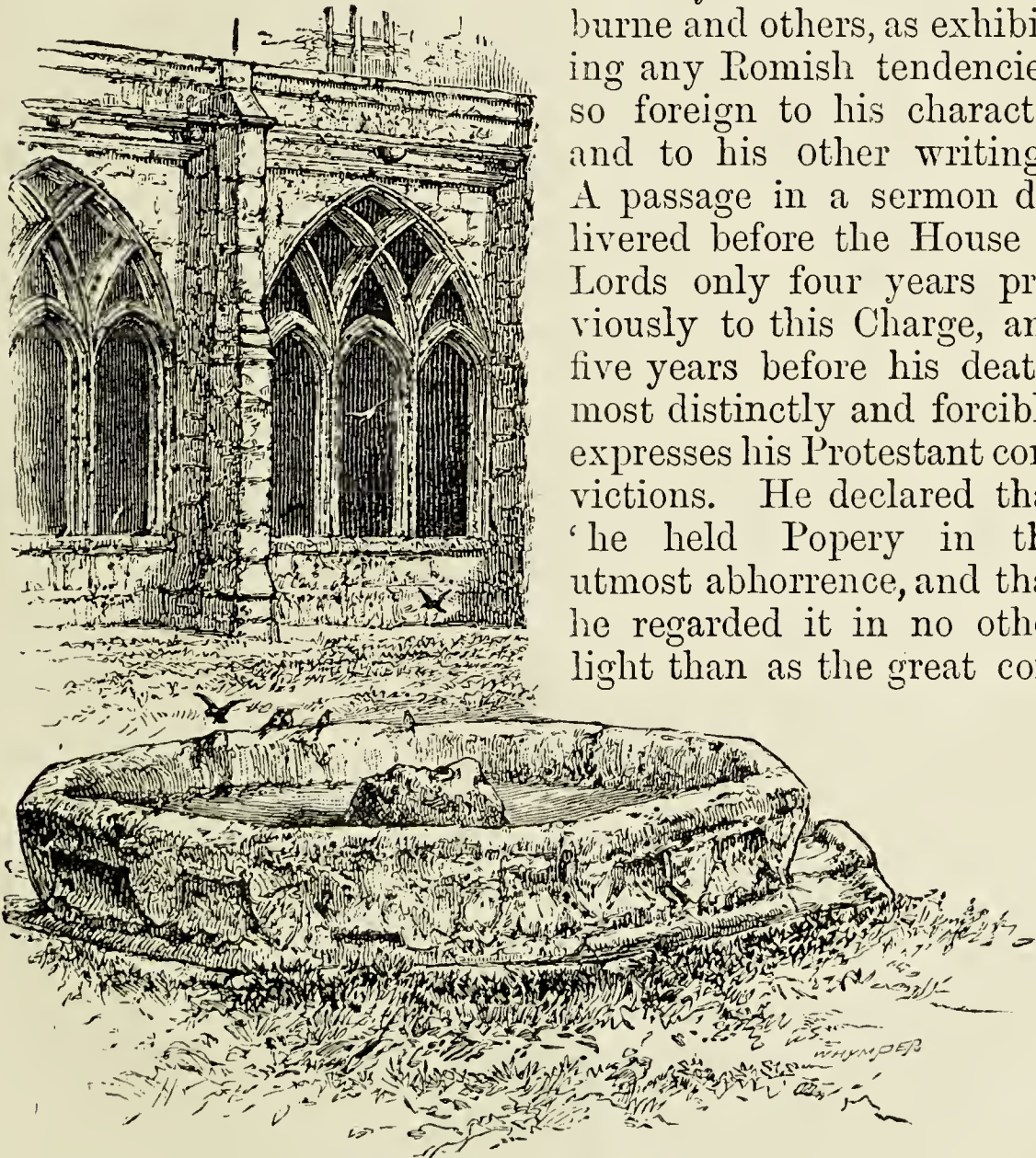
After some details of the plans that he had formed for the improvement of the property, Butler adds:

‘Thus, madam, I seem to have laid out a very long life for myself; yet in reality, everything I see puts me in mind of the shortness and uncertainty of it: the arms and inscriptions of my predecessors, what they did and what they neglected, and (from accidental circumstances) the very place itself, and the rooms I walk through and sit in. And when I consider, in one view, the many things of the kind I have just mentioned which I have upon my hands, I feel the burlesque of being employed in this manner at my time of life. But in another view, and taking in all circumstances, these things, as trifling as they may appear, no less than things of greater importance, seem to be put upon me to do, or at least to begin; whether I am to live to complete any or all of them is not my concern.’



Soon after he had entered on his new diocese he delivered and published his celebrated Charge on *The Use and Importance of External Religion*. Whatever may have been his views of the Church and her authority propounded in this Charge, it was a mere perversion to represent it, as was

done by Archdeacon Blackburne and others, as exhibiting any Romish tendencies, so foreign to his character and to his other writings. A passage in a sermon delivered before the House of Lords only four years previously to this Charge, and five years before his death, most distinctly and forcibly expresses his Protestant convictions. He declared that 'he held Popery in the utmost abhorrence, and that he regarded it in no other light than as the great cor-



CLOISTERS AT DURHAM.

ruption of Christianity, and as a manifest usurpation of all human and Divine authority.' The Charge itself is full of interest, in the view it gives of the character of the times. 'In the present turn of the age,' says Butler, 'one may observe a wonderful frugality in everything which has respect to

religion, and extravagance in everything else.' He proceeds to descant in a very sensible way on the value of set times and stated observances in keeping alive the sense of religion. That there was anything of Popery in this, was effectually disproved by Secker, then Archbishop of Canterbury, some years after Butler's death.

After this opinion, from one so eminently qualified to pronounce it, we need not enlarge upon this topic. More worthy of notice are the few speaking facts which have come down to us about the bishop's good example in his exalted position. An instance of the bishop's plain, unostentatious way of living is mentioned by the Rev. John Newton, one of whose friends told him how, when a young man, he dined with the bishop. The guest was a man of fortune, and the visit was by appointment, but the provision was no more than a joint of meat and a pudding. The bishop apologised for the plain fare by saying, 'It was his way of living; that he had long been disgusted by the fashionable expense of time and money in entertainments, and was determined that it should receive no countenance from his example.' At the same time Butler's generosity was unstinted, as was his outlay upon what he judged for the benefit of his see. He proved himself an admirable man of business in all that concerned the improvement of his episcopal property; while his individual benefactions were large. A clergyman is said once to have called upon him with regard to some benevolent scheme of which the bishop warmly approved. He called his steward: 'How much money have we in the house?' 'Five hundred pounds, my lord.' 'Five hundred pounds! What a shame for a bishop to have so much! Give it to this gentleman at once; he has a good use for it.' Of his private life at Durham scarcely any record remains. He loved music, and employed his under-secretary, Mr. Emms, who had been a chorister at St. Paul's, to play for him on the organ.

Thus simply and blamelessly did he pass the two remaining years of his life in this, his last sphere of labour. Though regular in his attendance at Parliament, he does not appear to have ever spoken in the House of Lords or to have taken any part in politics. Horace Walpole tells us that 'The Bishop of Durham had been wafted to that



see in a cloud of metaphysics, and remained absorbed in it.'

VI.

ILLNESS AND DEATH.

**T**his life was now rapidly drawing to a close. Soon after his removal to Durham, alarming symptoms indicated failure of health and the breaking up of his constitution. Under these circumstances he went to Bath to try the waters. There he was attended by his attached chaplain, Dr. Forster, and his old friend, Dr. Benson, Bishop of Gloucester. His sufferings became very great from an internal malady, and he was before long incapable of not only reading, but of attending to anything read or said.

On June 16, 1752, in his sixty-first year, he entered into rest. His will contained an injunction to his executor, characteristic of the humble-minded prelate, but to us most regrettable and tantalizing, 'that all my sermons, letters, and papers whatever, which are in a deal box locked, directed to Dr. Forster, and now standing in the little room within my library at Hampstead, be burnt, without being read by any one, as soon as may be after my decease.' This sufficiently explains why besides the *Fifteen Sermons*, the *Analogy*, and the *Durham Charge*, so little of Butler's literary work has survived.

All that is known of the bishop's last hours is a very touching story, repeated in various forms by different writers, amongst others by the biographer of Mr. Venn. It certainly seems quite in keeping with all we know of this earnest seeker after truth, and faithful, though at times desponding, servant of Christ. As his end drew near, he called for his chaplain, and said to him: 'Although I have endeavoured to avoid sin and to please God to the utmost of my power, yet, from the consciousness of perpetual infirmities, I am still afraid to die.' 'My lord,' said Forster, 'you have forgotten that Jesus Christ is a Saviour.' 'True,' was the answer, 'but how shall I know that He is a Saviour for *me*?' 'My lord,' rejoined his faithful adviser, 'it is written, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."' 'True,' again replied the bishop, 'and I am surprised that, though I

have read that Scripture a thousand times, I never felt its virtue till this moment; and now I die happy.'

This simple incident affords a very affecting glimpse into the heart of the great theologian in his dying hour, and remarkably illustrates the fact that it is only the full Gospel of peace which can rob death of its sting for the wisest and greatest man, as well as for the meanest and the most unlearned. It is also in perfect accord with the high eulogiums passed upon his character by those that knew him best. Miss Talbot, the daughter of his early college friend, wrote of him during his last illness in these strong terms:

'From the first of my real remembrance I have ever known in him the kind affectionate friend, the faithful adviser, which he would condescend to when I was quite a child; and the most delightful companion, from a delicacy of thinking, an extreme politeness, a vast knowledge of the world, and a something peculiar to be met with in nobody else. And all this in a man whose sanctity of manners and sublimity of genius gave him one of the first ranks among men, long before he was raised to that rank in the world which must still, if what I painfully fear should happen, aggravate such a loss, as one cannot but infinitely regret the good, which such a mind in such a station must have done.'

Another testimony is thus given by Surtees in his *History of Durham*: 'During the short time that Butler held the See of Durham he conciliated all hearts. In advanced years and on the episcopal throne, he retained the same genuine modesty and native sweetness of disposition which had distinguished him in youth and in retirement. During the ministerial performance of the sacred office a divine animation seemed to pervade his whole manner, and lighted up his pale wan countenance, already marked with the progress of disease, like a torch glimmering in its socket, yet bright and useful to the last.' 'He was,' says another, 'of a most reverend aspect; his face was thin and pale; but there was a divine placidness in his countenance which inspired veneration, and expressed the most benevolent mind. His white hair hung gracefully on his shoulders, and his whole figure was patriarchal.'

Such in his outer and inner man was this profound



Christian philosopher and valiant defender of the faith. On June 20, 1752, his remains were laid to rest by sorrowing relatives and friends, in the cathedral of Bristol, and an appropriate Latin epitaph from the pen of his devoted chaplain was inscribed upon his tomb. In 1834 another monument was erected in the same cathedral by subscription, with a tribute to his memory, composed in English by Dr. Southey, concluding with these words:—

‘Others had established the historical and prophetic grounds of the Christian religion, and that sure testimony of its truth which is found in its perfect adaptation to the heart of man. It was reserved for him to develope its Analogy to the constitution and course of Nature; and laying his strong foundations in the depth of that great argument, there to construct another and irrefragable proof; thus rendering philosophy subservient to faith, and finding in outward and visible things the type and evidence of those within the veil. Born A.D. 1692; died 1752.

‘He who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature.’<sup>1</sup>

## VII.

### BUTLER’S WRITINGS; THEIR STYLE.

**I**T is in his writings that we find the grandest and most enduring monument to Butler’s character and genius.

This is not the place to attempt either an analysis or a criticism of his *Analogy* or sermons. This has been already done exhaustively by many able writers, notably by Bishop Halifax, Bishop Fitzgerald, and recently by Mr. Gladstone. It is well in reading Butler’s works to recall the circumstances of the times when he lived and wrote. The first half of the eighteenth century in England was a period marked by intellectual activity and social progress. Two dominant ideas were rising to the surface and fixing themselves on public attention. These were religious toleration, and the claims of reason to be heard on every subject. The former began to assert itself during Butler’s boyhood; the

<sup>1</sup> Origen in *Philocalia*, p. 23, Ed. Cent.

latter was being evolved from the former in the way of natural consequence in his maturer years. Amid the consequent discussions, Christianity came to be regarded as a matter of mere intellectual conviction rather than as having its living centre in the heart and controlling the conscience, the affections, and the life. God was little known as a Father, but was generally acknowledged by even professed believers only as the 'Moral Governor of the Universe.' Vital godliness declined; all enthusiasm was regarded as irrational. The soil was well prepared for the dissemination of unbelief; nor was the great enemy of truth slow to take advantage of this grand opportunity. A long line, therefore, of able and subtle writers successively entered the lists against revealed religion, such as Toland, Shaftesbury, Collins, Woolston, Tindal, Morgan, and Chubb. These men endeavoured to prove: (1) That all that was true and valuable in Christianity was only a republication of the law of nature; (2) That the supernatural element in Holy Scripture was not credible; (3) That a severe and critical study of the history of the sacred canon deprived its contents of any special authority over faith. Among these Deistic writers, the ablest, perhaps, was Dr. Tindal, who, in 1706, published *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*; and in his old age, 1730, the work by which he is best known, *Christianity as old as the Creation*.

It was especially this attack upon the faith which brought Butler into the field, and led to the appearance of his *Analogy* in 1736, three years after Dr. Tindal's death. In the 'Advertisement' prefixed to it he wrote: 'It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if in this present age this were an agreed point amongst all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasure of the world.' Such was the bishop's picture of his own age. It is dark indeed; but his eminently judicious and truthful habit of mind forbids us to think it to have been too deeply coloured.



In some respects the *Analogy* is more suited to the age in which it was written than to the present time. Thus Mr. Matthew Arnold, whilst admitting that to read the *Analogy* is a 'very valuable mental exercise,' maintains that 'it is of no value to us, unless we hold the position of the Deists, with whom it dealt; and we do not.' It is, however, satisfactory to be told by Mr. Gladstone that, 'there is no sign at the present moment that a smaller aggregate of thought is employed upon Butler in the present day than in the preceding generations. It is moreover,' he adds, 'plain from the editions and relative works produced in Ireland and America that the circle of his influence has been materially extended. In the United States there have been nine editions of the *Analogy*, and scarcely fewer of the sermons. When,' also remarks Mr. Gladstone, 'we embrace in our conspectus the entire period of one hundred and sixty years since the publication of the *Analogy*, we may, I conceive, safely lay it down that his works have fastened on themselves in the English-speaking countries a larger amount of serious attention than those of any other writers on Moral Philosophy who have lived during the same period.' That this is a merited distinction we shall endeavour briefly to show.

A word may be prefaced concerning Butler's style. To many persons, undoubtedly, his *Sermons* and *Analogy* are hard reading. Speaking of the mental effort which they require, Mr. Gladstone justly says: 'The careless reader is a being towards whom, as such, Butler seems to have felt as great an antipathy as his gentle and considerate nature was capable of entertaining. Such a reader is effectually warned off the writings of Butler by their character. To read these with levity is impossible. The eye may indeed run down the pages, the images of the letters may be formed upon the retina; but the living being that dwells within the brain is unapproached, and either dormant or elsewhere employed. The works of Butler are in this respect like the works of Dante. We must make some kind of preliminary preparation; we must gird up the loins of the mind for the study.'

Butler is difficult, not because he is ambiguous or obscure, but because his style is *compressed*. Read him slowly and

carefully, and he is as perspicuous a writer as his great subject permits him to be. Every sentence, every phrase is well considered. Try to paraphrase him, and you are sure to miss some point. To those who complained of his obscurity, he himself admits that he was 'obliged to express himself in a manner which might seem strange to such as *did not observe the reason for it.*' That he could write with the most admirable perspicuity is shown in many a passage: for instance, in his solemn delineation of the consequences of vice and folly in the second chapter of the *Analogy*, and his description of an ideally virtuous kingdom or society of men in the third. It is evident from many a briefly indicated illustration or turn of phrase, from the 'pertinent examples and happy instances' which occur in his writings, that his imagination was both rich and vigorous; and he perhaps 'too often forgoes its legitimate use in his intense anxiety to be exact and truthful.'<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally, a piece of grave irony lights up the page: as when in his 'Advertisement' to the *Analogy* he announces his intention to prove '*that it is not so clear a case that there is nothing in*' Christianity; when again he remarks upon the objection from the theory of necessity against inflicting punishment upon criminals: 'As if the necessity which is supposed to destroy the injustice of murder, for instance, would not also destroy the injustice of punishing it!'<sup>2</sup> or when he speaks of 'the obligation of searching the Scriptures, in order to see what the scheme of revelation really is, instead of determining beforehand, from reason, what the scheme of it must be.' But more than almost any other writer Butler had his wit and imagination well in hand.

Another characteristic of his reasoning must be noted. So careful was he to keep his argument in exact correspondence with the truth, that he habitually *understates* his conclusions. 'It is a great secret in the art of reasoning,' writes one of Butler's critics, 'not to go for too much.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Fitzgerald's ed. of the *Analogy*, Dublin, 1860.

<sup>2</sup> *Analogy*, part i. ch. 6; part ii. ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. xliii. (J. J. Blunt).



## VIII.

PRESENT VALUE OF THE 'ANALOGY.'<sup>1</sup>

THE question indeed returns, whether in our day the results are likely to recompense us for the effort of studying Butler. It is urged, as in the sentence quoted from Matthew Arnold, that his method has been superseded by modern lines of thought, that the argument from *Analogy* is out of date, having lost its force through the general adhesion to theories of Evolution. Of course to those who deny the evidences of design in nature, and consider the existence of a First Cause at best an open question, it is vain to argue from 'the correspondence between the system of things and the

*Analogy*  
 2 ~~Analogy~~, & the Quin of Moral Agency by  
their neglecting &c. 33

## FACSIMILE OF INDEX TO 'ANALOGY.'

dispensation of Providence, which Revelation informs us of, and that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which experience together with reason informs us of, that is the known course of nature; as suggesting a presumption that they have both the same Author and Cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former being from God, drawn from anything which is analogical or similar to what is in the latter, which is acknowledged to be from Him.' Here it is evident that Butler works from the postulate of an intelligent Author of nature, as admitted by his opponents. To modern materialists or agnostics, who regard this first principle as unproven, the argument from *Analogy* will so far be unavailing. Still, even they may derive much benefit from a careful dispassionate study of Butler's method, even apart from its particular application. Nor should it be forgotten that in a brief but masterly paragraph, he has in

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction to the *Analogy*.

fact summarised the reasons of his great postulate,<sup>1</sup> that there is an intelligent Author of nature, and supreme governor of the world.

Moreover, as Mr. Gladstone has shown, Butler has unconsciously anticipated modern theological thought, and his arguments are applicable in forms never suggested, perhaps never dreamt of, by himself to controversies posterior to his time.

For instance: 'A corner stone of Butler's system is certainly to be found in his strong, but carefully-bounded, view of human ignorance. There is no part of his teaching more urgently required in the present day, when not only are the large recent accessions to human knowledge apt to be over-valued by some of those who at least have laboured hard to acquire and perhaps to add to them, but when many, who are totally ignorant of what they are, vain-gloriously boast of them as if they approximated to Omniscience.'<sup>2</sup> A course of reading of Butler's *Sermons* and *Analogy* would be a most wholesome discipline for minds thus disposed to pride themselves on their intellectual acquirements and scientific knowledge. No one could have attached a higher value than did he to all sound information and diligent persevering inquiry into truth; and yet in his sermon on Human Ignorance he points out that what we know is of effects only, not causes. We know nothing of the real essence of beings, next to nothing of ourselves, of our creation and conservation. He showed that all knowledge served to raise a curiosity which it could not satisfy. 'Every secret which is disclosed, every discovery which is made, every new effect which is brought to view, serves to convince us of numberless more which remain concealed and which we had before no suspicion of' (Sermon xv). 'Every extension of our knowledge is an extension, often a far wider extension, of our ignorance.' To the same purpose in his *Analogy* our author repeatedly urges our comparative ignorance of the reasons which underlie God's moral government of the world, and those involved in Christianity as 'a scheme imperfectly comprehended.' This

<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred to Butler's *Analogy and Sermons*, with Analogies and Notes, by the Rev. J. Angus, D.D., R.T.S.: and to Bishop Steere's edition of Butler's *Analogy*.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. James Martineau.



he does in order to restrain rash and presumptuous judgments of the wisdom and justice of the Divine appointments. Again and again he reminds his readers that 'we know not the whole of the case;' and this is a caution never so necessary and important as now, at the close of this nineteenth century.

Another characteristic of Butler's teaching is his rigid adherence to the inductive method. He takes his stand upon fact, nor will the most fascinating hypothesis divert him from his path. His psychology in his *Sermons on Human Nature* is throughout based upon the observation and consciousness of what man's constitution really is. Hence, by a course of argument which the ethical discussions of succeeding generations have not been able to shake, he is able to assign to the various human faculties and affections their fitting place, and to vindicate the supreme authority of conscience. Hence, also, in the *Analogy*, he is able to portray with unsurpassed fidelity the moral and spiritual world as it is, with its phenomena and tendencies, leading to the irresistible conclusion, even apart from the concessions of the Deists whom he opposed, that the whole, in combination with the natural world, is a scheme, a system, implying a mind, a 'moral Governor,' above and beyond all.

Here, it may be remarked, will be found the true answer to the allegation sometimes made that the *Analogy* 'raises more doubts than it solves'; even that it is 'a terrific persuasive to Atheism.'<sup>1</sup> And certainly, if its only purpose were to retort upon the Deist the difficulties of his system, the sceptic might cut the knot by refusing to believe either, and falling back upon agnosticism. Butler goes much farther than this. His true intent is positive, not merely negative; and the moral system, as he presents it, is a more eloquent witness to the Divine than even the starry heavens.

The *Analogy of Revealed Religion with the Constitution and Course of Nature* is hardly so much studied as the former part of Butler's argument; and undoubtedly there are some of his positions, especially in the chapters on Miracles and Prophecy, which have to be modified in the light of modern criticism; yet some of his most masterly reasonings are con-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. James Martineau.

tained in this part of his work. See in particular his discussion of Christianity as 'a scheme imperfectly comprehended,' and of 'The Appointment of a Mediator and the Redemption of the World through Him.'<sup>1</sup>

Butler has effectually cut the ground from under many attacks on the Bible by modern critics, arising from theories about the authorship and text of the books of the Sacred Canon. Although these new phases of unbelief were not thought of till long after Butler's days, with his philosophic sagacity and grasp of great principles, he has unconsciously anticipated them, or at any rate has furnished us with well-proved weapons against them.

'Butler,' Dr. Chalmers once wrote, 'is in theology what Bacon is in science. The reigning principle of the latter is, that it is not for man to theorize on the works of God; and of the former, that it is not for man to theorize on the ways of God. Both deferred alike to the certainty of experience, as being paramount to all the plausibilities of hypothesis; and he who attentively studies the writings of these great men will find a marvellous concurrence of principle between a sound philosophy and a sound faith.'<sup>2</sup>

It has indeed been alleged that Butler fails to treat subjects of religion in a manner duly evangelical. And no doubt the conception of the Christian life as portrayed in the *Analogy* is almost exclusively from the intellectual side. It is clear, vivid, but joyless. It should, however, be remembered that Butler was dealing with reasoners who would be deterred by anything like emotionalism or glow. His caution, if nothing else, restrained him. Then, the spiritual coldness of the age would affect the defenders as well as the assailants of the faith. The chill pervaded the whole atmosphere of thought. At the same time he does most distinctly recognise the great doctrines of the Gospel, man's ruin through sin, redemption in Christ Jesus, and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He was not an interpreter, but a defender of the Gospel.

W. BURNET.

<sup>1</sup> *Analogy*, ii. chs. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> MS. entry, made July 3, 1833, in a copy of the Greek Testament which had belonged to Bishop Butler.



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